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# Linguistic Evidence against Predicativism

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## Abstract

The view that proper names are uniformly predicates ('predicativism') has recently gained prominence. I review linguistic evidence against it. Overall, the (cross-) linguistic evidence suggests that proper names function as predicates when they appear in a grammatically predicative position and as referential expressions when they are grammatically in a referential position. Conceptual grounds on which the predicativist view might nonetheless be upheld include 'uniformity', i.e., that a single semantic value be lexically specified for names in all of their occurrences irrespective of differences in their grammar. However, 'being a predicate' or 'being referential' are not lexical properties of words but indications for how these grammatically function on an occasion of their use. Moreover, the intuitively referential and intuitively predicative uses of proper names precisely covary with grammatical differences. A proper name is therefore a predicate when it is predicatively used, not when its grammar and meaning are different. Given this grammar-meaning alignment there is no motivation to posit a novel 'covert syntax' for names in their referential uses, which breaks this alignment. Cross-linguistic evidence from languages such as Catalan, which features overt determiners in referential uses of proper names, moreover turns out to strongly support the view that the grammar of human language is systematically sensitive to differences in the referential and predicative uses of names.

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## 1. The Predicativist View

According to predicativism, 'names are predicates in all of their occurrences' (Fara 2015: 60). The view has prominent philosophical predecessors (Quine 1960; Burge 1973), and in its most elaborated contemporary version holds that 'When names appear as bare singulars in argument position, they constitute the predicative component of a *denuded determiner phrase*, a determiner phrase with an unpronounced Determiner', where 'the unpronounced determiner is the definite article, so that bare singular names actually constitute the predicative component of a denuded definite description' (Fara 2015: 60).<sup>1</sup> Since many languages do not have a definite article like English 'the', and others have more than one kind of definite article (e.g., Catalan or Maori), predicativism can in the first instance only be evaluated as a language-specific claim about English, a point to which we return below. To make the claim about English formally explicit, consider (1), where 'Russell' is a name and occurs in an argument position (i.e., that of the grammatical subject):

(1) Russell entered.

Since it is linguistically uncontroversial that proper names, viewed as word classes, are nouns (category N), they project noun phrases (NP), which as such form the complements of determiners where these are present. Therefore, predicativism amounts to the claim that as occurring in (1) and despite its intuitively referential reading, the proper name 'Russell' in (1) can be

represented as in (2a), where it functions grammatically as a common noun, which forms the predicative part of a determiner phrase (DP). Predicativism in its contemporary version,<sup>2</sup> adds the twist that the empty determiner position (D) depicted in (2a) specifically is the unpronounced English definite article ‘the’, so that the representation becomes (2b).<sup>3</sup> In short, a name is a definite description with an unpronounced definite article<sup>4</sup>:

- (2) a. [DP D [NP Russell]]  
 b. [DP Ø<sub>the</sub> [NP Russell]]

In the remainder, I review nine linguistic reasons against this view, which predicativism needs to overcome to be defensible. It also needs to address evidence from a number of domains of inquiry other than linguistics, which support the conclusion that proper names in their most standard uses function differently from predicative common nouns. This evidence in particular comes from selective proper name anomia or sparing in acquired brain disorders, including double dissociations between proper names and common nouns; from the pattern of acquisition of names and common nouns in normal development; from anomalies specific to proper names in neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder; and from the distinct neural correlates of proper and common nouns (see e.g., Semenza 2011; Martins and Farrajota 2007; Mottron, Belleville and Stip 1996; Bélanger and Hall 2006; Hall 2009). I will not review this non-linguistic evidence here.

I will also not develop any positive view. A positive view that is not subject to the problems below and has been tried and tested for over three decades in a large range of languages and language families is well documented elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> This other view is not the view that proper names are uniformly referential expressions, which is manifestly false in light of their predicative uses. It rather rejects the very meaningfulness of the question of ‘whether proper names are referential or predicative’. An immediate problem with how this question is posed is that, whatever one’s specific view, it is agreed that proper names can occur both with an intuitively referential and with an intuitively predicative meaning. The disagreement is over how to account for this and with what grammatical analysis. In short, all names can be used in at least two ways, depending on the grammar of their occurrence. It would therefore be natural to methodologically assume as a null hypothesis that proper names are grammatically predicates only when they are predicates, not when they function referentially. Predicativism, on the other hand, wants to defend the uniformity claim, according to which names are predicates in all of their occurrences. Therefore, it needs to propose a revisionist analysis of the grammar of names on their referential occurrences. The problem here is not only the evidence discussed below that the ‘covert determiner’ posited in (2b) is fictitious in English. It is also that referentiality and predicativity strictly correlate with the (non-revisionist) grammar that we observe in a one-to-one fashion, in such a way that proper names have the predicative type of meaning precisely when they are grammatically used as predicates. A revisionist grammar thus seems also undesired: when the grammar that we see exactly vindicates the readings that we observe, we should not change our analysis of the grammar based on semantically grounded ideas on how proper names should generally function. Since the relevant predictor for the two usages is grammar, positing a uniform, lexically specified predicative semantic value for proper names seems misguided (as much as positing a referential semantic value would be).

## 2. Evidence against

First, predicativism as stated above makes it immediately surprising why the definite determiner (or any other determiner) can and normally has to be absent in (3a,c) but is obligatorily present

in (3b) (stars within a bracket indicate that the determiner is illegitimate, while stars outside of a bracket indicate that it cannot go missing):

- (3) a. (\*The) Russell entered.
- b. (The) man I met yesterday entered.
- c. (\*The) man is a mammal.

(3a) only makes the determiner overt that is hypothesized to be ‘unpronounced’ in Fara (2015: 60) or ‘null’ in Matushansky (2015). This should not lead to ungrammaticality when (3a) is used in the same context in which (1) is used. Failure to pronounce an element that is otherwise present in a grammatical structure should not lead to problems with grammaticality.<sup>6</sup> Compare the case of (4a), where ‘lamb’ arguably occurs as part of a full DP as indicated in (5a), which, in the absence of an overt determiner, receives a default quantificational interpretation (Longobardi 1994; 2005) on the lines of (6a); analogously for (6b) as a quantificational interpretation of (4b), with the structure in (5b). The sentences in (6a,b) thus contain a lexical determiner in the hidden positions posited in (5a,b), making their existential quantificational meaning explicit. The point is that here we crucially do not see a change in either their meaning or grammaticality, contrary to the case above, leading to more confidence that in (5a,b), the empty positions do indeed exist<sup>7</sup>:

- (4) a. I had lamb.
- b. I saw cats.
- (5) a. I had [<sub>DP</sub> ∅ [<sub>NP</sub> lamb]].
- b. I saw [<sub>DP</sub> ∅ [<sub>NP</sub> cats]].
- (6) a. I had some (amount of) lamb (-meat).
- b. I saw some cats.

Turning to (3b), it presents evidence exactly complementary to (3a). In English, there is in fact no such thing as a definite description that can lose its determiner while retaining its meaning (for the change of meaning ensuing when it is dropped, see the discussion of (8) below). In short, for any definite interpretation of a nominal, the determiner is obligatorily overt, and there is no such thing, in English, as ‘a definite description with an unpronounced definite article’, i.e., an ‘incomplete’ or ‘denuded’ definite description in the sense of Section 1. Predicativism maintains that ‘proper names are definite descriptions’ (Matushansky 2015: 335). So why should the determiner in the case of (1) and (3a) be obligatorily absent, when in all normal definite descriptions such as (3b) it is obligatorily present?<sup>8</sup>

Things get even more puzzling when we see in (3c) that all common nouns can occur without an overt determiner, but then precisely cease to function as definite descriptions: as occurring in (3c), ‘man’ has an intuitively referential (i.e., kind-denoting) reading, more similar to that of a proper name (though the referent is now a natural kind). Since the exact same lexical item is present in (3b,c), i.e., ‘man’, this difference in meaning must relate to differences in the grammar of its occurrence. In other words, the obligatory presence or absence of the definite determiner makes a fundamental difference to meaning. It is not a ‘merely syntactic’ fact, which we could decide to simply discard in favor of a ‘uniform’ analysis on which the definite article is present even when we do not see it. Appearances can be deceptive, of course, as a long history in grammatical theory has shown when it has motivated the existence of ‘empty categories’, as in control constructions or null subjects. Empty articles are not grammatically required in the same sense as these empty categories, however, and their obligatory presence or absence is systematically important to what reading we get, whether in the case of common nouns (3c) or proper names (3a), hence demotivating a uniform analysis of both as definite descriptions

on all of their occurrences. As a general methodological heuristic, if a hypothesis says that something is there, and in fact it is not there (or even forbidden, as in this instance), then special evidence is required to conclude that it is 'there, but hidden'. If we can preserve the grammar that we see, everything else being equal, we should do so: the null hypothesis is that when an article is absent, it is absent. In sum, the first problem for predicativism is:

### Problem 1

Pronouncing the definite determiner hypothesized to be unpronounced in phrases containing proper names, as well as dropping the determiner in definite descriptions, leads to ungrammaticality.

The second problem has been touched upon above but is worth keeping separate: When the definite determiner hypothesized to be unpronounced in phrases containing proper names ends up being pronounced, we see a systematic change in meaning in the relevant nominal phrase, which correlates with a change that we see when we drop the definite determiner of a definite description containing a common noun. Thus, suppose there are two Johns, one old and one young. I can then utter (7), and I will have said that of the two Johns, the old one came:

(7) The old John came in.

The nominal subject in (7) has a descriptive and indeed contrastive reading (note that any contrast presupposes a description).<sup>9</sup> Such contrastive–descriptive readings are precisely unavailable, however, when the determiner is absent, as in *John came in*, and even when the name is preceded by an adjective, as in (8) (from Longobardi 1994), unless the adjective is stressed:

(8) Old John came in.

The natural generalization, therefore, is that the presence of the definite determiner in conjunction with a proper name systematically makes readings available that are otherwise unavailable. These readings exploit the (albeit limited) descriptive potential of proper name, usually together with an additional explicit lexical description. The latter can take the form of a modifying adjective, as in (8), but we also get the forms in (9). (9a and b) could for example be uttered after I report from an encounter with a person who I introduced earlier as being called 'Russell', while (9c) exploits the fact that Russell is a (single) famous person, different from any other and non-significant Russell:

- (9) a. The Russell I met had a hat.  
       b. That Russell was a genius.  
       c. THE Russell was a genius.

As occurring (9), 'Russell' has a descriptive reading in the following sense: as part of the complex DP in which it occurs, the name serves, together with a modifying relative clause (in (9a)), a deictic element (in (9b)), and a stress (in (9c)), as an identifying predicate for the referent in question. By consequence, the person is referred to and picked out as *a Russell*, i.e., an *x such that x is a Russell*. As occurring in (1), however, i.e., without any overt definite determiner, the name lacks this reading: its referent is simply taken to be familiar, without any added definite description. This is crucially not to say that no descriptive information is present in this case: obviously, in particular, the speaker of (1) presupposes the referent to be called 'Russell' (which is not to say that he explicitly asserts the referent to be called 'Russell', a point to which I return). However, as the facts make clear, in (1), this descriptive information is normally not rich enough to support a descriptive reading (witness the ungrammatical (3a) as contrasted with the grammatical (9a–c)) to allow for descriptive readings as seen in (7) or (9a–c).<sup>10</sup> The natural

generalization, in short, is that what allows the presence of the determiner is that the reading is rich enough in terms of descriptive content (yes, in the cases of (7) and (9a–c), where more descriptive information than is contained in the lexical proper name is provided to characterize the referent; no, in the cases of (1) or (3a), where we only have the lexical proper name). This suggests that proper names in and of themselves (i.e., lexically) have too little of such information, demonstrating a difference in how they are used to refer, in line with the difference that we see in their grammar. To put this differently, in order to have a genuine definite description, you need descriptive information. If you don't have the latter, you don't have a definite description, exactly as the grammar suggests. In sum,

## Problem 2

Adding the hypothesized unpronounced definite determiner (i.e., making it overt) systematically leads to a change in meaning, namely a descriptive one.

Pronouncing unpronounced material in a grammatical structure should not lead to a systematic change in meaning of this kind. All standard examples given in the literature on predicativism face this problem: They all exhibit descriptive and quantificational readings of names, which are systematically unavailable in the absence of the determiner. To illustrate with examples that are standard since Burge (1973):

- (10) There is one Alfred in my class.
- (11) Alfreds are not usually proud of their name.
- (12) Most Alfreds are German.

In all of these cases where the name appears as the NP-complement of an overt determiner, the reading is not referential but quantificational. In (11) and (12), I generically refer to persons called 'Alfred'. In (10) I could refer to a particular person, but the expression I use only quantifies over people as falling under a certain description, the specified description being that the person in question is called 'Alfred'. If I am wrong and no one in my class is called Alfred, (10) is false. When saying 'Alfred is in my class', by contrast, I directly refer to a particular person, presupposing he has this name and that it is familiar to the hearer. If my presupposition is wrong, I will still have referred to that person, though under a wrong lexical description. In the same way, when using (1) I do not merely refer to whoever is called Russell – nor even to whoever person to whom the description 'Russell' applies uniquely. If this was so, (3a) would be predicted to be grammatical, which it is not. It cannot be that a name occurring as a bare singular NP has the structure of a definite description with an unpronounced determiner, when its occurrence with such a determiner systematically deprives it of the way in which it refers when occurring bare, leading to descriptive readings instead.<sup>11</sup>

Crucially, one can of course always decide to abstract from such differences in meaning and ways of establishing reference – and one could have plenty of reasons in particular to formally eliminate proper names, which are not needed in mathematics, in favor of definite descriptions, in one's logical language, as Quine (1960) proposed. But the present discussion is about natural language and the structure of proper names, which is a matter of fact rather than formal decision. The correctness of one's view should here not depend on having to ignore systematic differences that falsify it. One should not judge the color of cats based on how they look in the dark. Our empirical claims should not be a trivial consequence of our chosen level of theoretical abstraction.

Fara's (2015) response to the problem of distributional differences in proper names and common nouns is to seek to capture these differences in terms of a syntactic generalization. Proper names and common nouns, she concedes, 'differ syntactically in that names but not common

count nouns can appear as bare unmodified singulars in argument position' (p.79); 'they are of a different grammatical category: names differ syntactically from common nouns since they distribute differently with respect to the overt definite article' (p.113). The second claim is technically incorrect as noted, since proper names are lexically precisely of the same 'grammatical category' as common nouns, namely, the category N. The difference Fara notes rather relates to the behavior of proper names and common nouns when these occur as parts of phrases, i.e., at a grammatical level. Moreover, the differences obtain only when proper names are used referentially, and we precisely do not see them, if and when proper names are coerced grammatically into behaving like common nouns, as in the standard examples (10–12) above. The crucial point, however, is that these differences in distribution are *prima facie* counterevidence against predicativism. In order to develop this view empirically, therefore, this counterevidence needs to be unmasked as being only apparent. In direct contradiction to that, Fara proceeds with an attempt to capture the distributional difference through a syntactic generalization, whose virtue is said to lie in providing 'a simple explanation of the distribution of names with the overt definite article "the"'. Counterevidence is not dealt with by capturing it correctly through a formal generalization, since the generalization, even if correct, captures no more than the counterevidence against the view under scrutiny. Let us now consider the generalization itself,

**Where  $\emptyset_{\text{the}}$ :** The definite article must be realized as  $\emptyset_{\text{the}}$  when it has a name as its sister, unless it is stressed.

This generalization is technically incorrect<sup>12</sup> and also falsified by its prediction that in *The Russell I met was a sad memory of his former self*, where the definite article occurs 'with a name as its sister' and is not stressed, it should 'be realized as  $\emptyset_{\text{the}}$ ', since in fact it must be overt: witness the ungrammatical: *Russell I met was...* The deeper problem however is the above: **Where  $\emptyset_{\text{the}}$**  simply restates what we already know: the definite article is obligatorily absent when its complement is a proper name in a referential use. But this is precisely the fact that contradicts the theory. It suggests that the grammar is systematically sensitive to the proper name/common noun distinction, as long as names have their more standard referential uses, which predicativism predicts it should not be.<sup>13</sup> There is therefore no point capturing this fact as elegantly as possible through a formal generalization. Moreover, the very fact that the generalization needs to be hedged by the clause 'unless it is stressed' illustrates why predicativism is wrong: the generalization that comes out of (9) above is that the determiner can only occur in front of the name if something else happens, too, which increases the descriptive content involved: for example a relative clause, a deictic element, or a stress. But this means no less than that the absence of the determiner goes with different kinds of readings, which are less descriptive and in this sense more referential. To stress the foundational point missed: the grammar of proper names is systematically different from that of ordinary common nouns, different again when they function referentially and when they do not, and in a way that these differences covary with the differences in meaning.

Problem 2 leads to a third: Not only does making the hypothesized definite determiner overt systematically predict the wrong readings for referentially used proper names, but a covert (phonetically null) determiner also predicts the wrong readings. This was illustrated in (4–5) above. There, we arguably have a phonologically null determiner position, but the readings are indefinite-quantificational ones, not the definite-referential one that all parties agree is seen when proper names occur referentially. So there is a double problem for the empty D position that predicativism posits in all occurrences of proper names: an overt version of this hypothesized covert D leads to the wrong results, but leaving it empty also does. Empty



determiner positions do not predict the readings that we actually see and need to explain, but other readings that we do not actually see in bare proper names – an observation that was a starting point for Longobardi (1994) when he first raised the issue of how bare proper names can really be. For a definite-referential reading to be obtained, both the lexical NP and the determiner have to be overt, and they are not, in the case of referentially used proper names. In short, Problem 3 is the following:

### Problem 3

Covert (unpronounced) determiners predict indefinite-quantificational readings, not definite-referential ones.

The fourth problem is that neither predicativity nor referentiality are lexical notions, i.e., properties that attach to proper names viewed as lexical items. This can be seen from the fact that just as all proper names can (though less standardly) function grammatically as common nouns, all common nouns can (though less standardly) function as names. This is shown in (13–14) for the common noun ‘fish’:

(13) Fish entered.

(14) I love fish.

As Borer (2005) noted, far from being ungrammatical, (13) actually has a (single) reading: It coerces the reading that a person called ‘Fish’ entered (e.g., Mr. Fish), in which case the substantive lexical content of the common noun is depleted (in referring to Mr. Fish, one shouldn’t be thinking about fish). This means that one problem listed by Fara (2015:77) for her own view, based on a critique of Burge (1973) by King (2006:149), is actually not a problem for her view. The alleged problem is that (13) is ungrammatical, and hence, proper names and common nouns actually behave differently. But (13) is fully grammatical, though crucially a referential reading is triggered when the determiner is absent, exactly as when a proper name occurs without a determiner, functioning referentially.<sup>14</sup> As for (14), it is an instance of kind-reference of a common noun: the reading is equally not quantificational, unlike in (15a,b):

(15) a. I would love some fish.

b. I had fish.

Seen this way, the common noun ‘fish’ becomes a name (for a kind) in (14), while in (13), it becomes the arbitrary name of an individual. The common noun has a referential rather than quantificational reading in both cases. This is the fourth problem: All proper names can grammatically function as common nouns, and all common nouns can function as names (of kinds). This is a systematic fact, which depends on the grammar of the occurrence of the proper name rather than its lexical specifications.<sup>15</sup> Thus, for example, in (16), the kind-reading is as unavailable as it is in (15):

(16) I love the fish.

It therefore seems as pointless to say that names are predicates as it would be to say that predicates are names. This would mean to be oblivious to the effect that grammar has on how lexical items are used to refer, regulating referentiality and predicativity alike.

### Problem 4

Whether proper names function as predicates is a function of the grammar of their occurrence, exactly as in the case of common nouns functioning as names.



This is illustrated throughout above. As noted, on everyone's view, the intuitive difference in meaning between (1), on the one hand, and (10–12), on the other, is to be preserved and to be explained somehow. The intuitive difference is that the use of the name is referential in (1) while it is predicative in (10–12). In all cases reviewed so far, this difference covaries with grammatical factors in a one-to-one fashion. In each case, we can look at the grammar of the occurrence of the name and systematically predict from this whether the meaning will be of the first type or the second. And of course, we can go the other way round, starting from the intuitive difference in meaning and predicting a difference in grammar from that. If grammar and meaning covary in this fashion, we are looking at a difference that is mediated grammatically, not lexically. Consequently, the assimilation of the grammar of names in both types of occurrences leading to the claim that both have a determiner in front of them, whether overt or covert, is the wrong aim from the beginning: there are differences in meaning and these correspond, in a one-to-one fashion, to the grammatical differences that we see. We should not abstract from the grammatical differences that are there in plain sight, when it is precisely the assimilation of the two types of occurrences at some 'deep' grammatical level that predicts the absence of the meaning differences we seek to explain, making the wrong distributional predictions as well.

The fifth problem is that predicativism as stated is an empirical, language-specific claim: obviously, it cannot hold for a language like, say, Polish, where there are no definite determiners equivalent to English 'the', or Catalan, where there are two possible equivalents of it. Languages differ in their morpho-lexical resources, and no one would be tempted to postulate a 'covert lexical item' in a language when there is no overt one corresponding to it. All languages, however, including Polish of course, have nouns functioning as proper names. This does not mean that predicativism could not be adapted as we move from language to language, preserving its basic principles. Moreover, in fairness, any theory of names will begin from the data in some language, and then have to generalize. However, by depending on specific morpho-lexical resources, predicativism is not set up to make its generalizability a promising avenue to pursue. It is useful here to compare the case of the tradition mentioned in footnote 5, which gives a parameterized account of proper name reference based on grammatical principles, which is directly designed to allow a general account. Given that the morpho-lexical resources are a primary dimension of cross-linguistic variation, universals of language are more likely to be found in semantically significant grammatical relations. A general theory of names is clearly what a philosophical approach to language has to aim for. In sum,

### Problem 5

Predicativism is not a general claim about proper names.

It is importantly true that in some languages other than English, proper name NPs can systematically appear as the complements of determiners, in such a way that they retain their referential reading. That is, in these languages, an overt definite determiner does not lead to a switch to the descriptive–quantificational reading. However, evidence that in such other languages referential readings of proper names go with determiners is not as such a reason that such determiners exist covertly in English. Moreover, in the often-cited yet rarely explicitly analyzed case of Catalan, there is a specialized article that only goes with proper names and only when the reading of the proper name is referential as opposed to descriptive.<sup>16</sup> In any of the above examples with descriptive readings, a switch to a definite determiner with a different morphological form, which is essentially like English 'the', has to occur. The facts, with some interesting differences between Balearic and mainland Catalan, are summarized in the Appendix. The grammar of Catalan, in short, systematically distinguishes between referential and predicative occurrences

of names, while the prediction of predicativism is that it systematically should not do so, since predicativity is assumed throughout. In the case of Italian, too, definite articles can occur with proper names when they are used referentially, and there is, unlike in Catalan, only a single definite article in this language. Yet even here, a case has long been made that this article, when it goes with proper names under referential readings, is in fact an expletive, despite its morphological identity with the normal, definite article (Longobardi 1994: 26–7). Its meaning is not that of English ‘the’, which as we saw above is only compatible with descriptive readings when occurring with a proper name (see (3) vs. (7–9)). In sum,

#### Problem 6

Languages in which proper names under referential readings co-occur with determiners falsify predicativism.<sup>17</sup>

Next, note systematic meaning difference between the following, which are grammatically different in that in (17) and (18), the name ‘Russell’ occurs as part of a naming predicate, which is a sentential predicate in (17) and part of a restrictive relative clause in (18); while in (19), the name appears as the predicative part of a definite description, and in (20), it is in a referential position:

- (17) This guy is called Russell.
- (18) [The guy called Russell] is smart.
- (19) [The Russell I met] is smart.
- (20) [Russell] is smart.

Now, in (17), an assertion is made, which is false if the guy is not called Russell. In (18), the assertion made is that a certain guy called Russell is smart, and it is not asserted that he is called Russell (which would be the case in ‘The guy is called Russell and he is smart’). However, the guy in question is referred to under this description (‘called Russell’), with the speaker clearly presupposing the description to apply, i.e., to be true, as noted in passing earlier. In this case, if the guy is not called Russell, then it can still be true that the person referred to is smart, though there is a presupposition failure related to the use of the name as part of the relative clause. In sum, a naming predicate ‘being called Russell’ is present in both cases, but there is a difference in grammar, which associates with differences related to assertion and presupposition. The same presupposition present in (18) is also present in (19), but it is weaker, since plainly there is now no explicit predicate ‘being called Russell’ anywhere to be seen. However, the name ‘Russell’ is still used, and it occurs in a grammatically predicative position, as part of a definite description. The job of a definite description is to pick out an individual under a description, and if a lexical proper name occurs as part of such a description, it is part of the descriptive information that the speaker provides: he presents the individual referred to as a Russell. But no assertion that the individual is called ‘Russell’ is made, anymore than it is in (18). But equally, nothing is explicitly said about what the person is called, unlike in (18). In line with that, the presupposition in question is weaker in (19). If the speaker of (19) had just overheard the name and the guy in question turned out to be called something else, he might not be much bothered (while in (18), he would more likely have to take back his claim). Still, in both (18) and (19), ‘Russell’ features grammatically as part of a descriptive predicate that is presupposed to apply to the referent:

- (21) the *x*: Russell (*x*)

In (20), finally, there is of course again no assertion present of the kind that we see in (17), and the presupposition just noted to be present in both (18) and (19) (stronger in the former, weaker in the latter) is even weaker. It is present still, since there is no such thing as a use of a proper

name without a presupposition that the referent is called by that name. This is not because a special naming relation is attached lexically to proper names, but because that much descriptive information is part and parcel of simply using each and every lexical noun: in exactly the same way, I cannot refer to an object as a bonnet, without presupposing that it is called by that name. Being minimal in this way, however, the presupposition in question is weaker in (20) than in all of (17), (18), and (19). This is why (22) is so easily interpretable in an appropriate context (e.g., two people talking about a common friend, noting that his actual name is not the one they are used to call him by):

(22) Russell is not actually called Russell.

By contrast, (23)–(25) show an increasing degree of oddity:

(23) ?The Russell I met is not actually called Russell.

(24) ?\*The guy called Russell is not actually called Russell.

(25) \*This guy is called Russell and is not actually called Russell.

In other words, while descriptive information is necessarily present in each and every use of a name, it is present in different ways, in line with differences in the grammar of the occurrence of a proper name, which we see systematically in (17) to (20). Predicativism predicts the absence of such differences: rather than stipulating that names are uniformly predicates, or that ‘naming relations’ are associated to them lexically as a ‘semantic primitive’ (Matushansky 2015: 337), we need to look at the specific grammar of their respective occurrences. Depending on whether the name occurs referentially and bare, whether it is part of a definite description, part of an indefinite description, or part of a naming predicate, the dialectic between reference, predication, and presupposition will play itself out in different ways:

#### Problem 7

Predicativism does not predict differences in how different referential and predicative uses of proper names are sensitive to the satisfaction of the condition of being called by the relevant name, which again systematically depend on the grammar of their occurrence.

Problem 8 builds on Problem 4. There the point was that both lexical proper names and lexical common noun can function grammatically both referentially and predicatively, depending on the grammar of their occurrence. I now formulate Problem 8 to stress a foundational point related to this: The ‘names as predicates’ view makes a conceptual error. We cannot look at a word in isolation and conclude that it is a predicate. ‘Predicate’ is a grammatical notion, and there are predicates only in grammatical configurations. Consider (26), where the common noun ‘man’ is part of a sentential predicate, which as a whole denotes a property, while in (27) it is part of the nominal restriction of a DP, which is the subject and on this occurrence as a whole has an indefinite-specific interpretation. In (28), in turn, it is again the grammatical subject and in a referential position (referring to a kind):

(26) I am a man.

(27) A man entered.

(28) Man comes from Africa.

Clearly, the differences in referentiality between (26) and (27) cannot have to do with either ‘man’, ‘a’, or ‘a man’ (the latter of which, in particular, occurs identically in both); they rather relate to the grammar of the occurrence of the phrase as a whole. Equally, the referential use of ‘man’ in (28) has nothing to do with its specifications as a lexical item, since it identically occurs in both (26) and (27) as well. Hence, claims about a word functioning as referential

expressions or as predicates (whether sentential or nominal) are never lexical claims: they are grammatical ones. Therefore, the claim that in (29), 'Delia' functions as a predicate (Fara 2015: 67, following Matushansky 2008), if correct, does as such not begin to be evidence that it also functions as a predicate in (30), where as Fara (2015:69) notes, it occurs in an argument position:

(29) My parents called me Delia.

(30) Delia is a philosopher.

How a name functions grammatically in one sentence implies nothing for how it functions when it occurs with a different grammar.<sup>18</sup> Words never are referential or predicative lexically. Consider (31) vs. (32):

(31) Trieste is no Vienna.

(32) Vienna is no Trieste.

(31) means that Trieste is not the kind of place that Vienna is: is not Vienna-like. (32) says about Vienna that it is not Trieste-like. So evidently, 'Vienna', as a lexical item, has no problems acting as a predicate in (31) and as a referential expression in (32), and the same applies in reverse for 'Trieste'. So is 'Vienna' a predicate, or a referential expression? The question is meaningless, for being a predicate or being referential are not properties that any word can have lexically. This explains that, as noted, any common noun can also become referential, denoting either an object or a kind. In short,

#### Problem 8

The claim of the 'unified view' that names are predicates uniformly, irrespective of the grammar of their occurrence, confuses grammatical functions of words with their lexical specifications.

As a final point, it is arguably a general fact about natural language that one expression never means the same as another expression with a different grammar. To illustrate the kind of claim intended here, consider that once upon a time, some philosophers thought that minimal pairs as in (33) 'express the same proposition':

(33) a. Bill kissed Alice.

b. Alice was kissed by Bill.

While one could always develop a technical notion of 'proposition' that abstracts from various meaning differences, it is now well known that such minimal pairs such as this actually systematically differ in meaning. This not only concerns information structure (such as what is the topic in (33a/b)) but also scope (e.g., The target wasn't hit by many arrows and *Many arrows didn't hit the target* need not be true in the same circumstances). The pair in (34) illustrates the same point:

(34) a. It seems that I am happy.

b. I seem to be happy.

Again, one might be tempted to ignore the grammatical difference here and provide a uniform semantic analysis. However, if I don't feel particularly happy, yet a doctor shows me a brain scan from which he concludes that I am happy, I could utter (34a) in preference over (34b). (34b) has a more experiential character, and is preferred as and when the emotion is felt in a first-person way.

Based on such examples, it is a tempting generalization that, whether or not there is such a thing as synonymy at a lexical level, there never is synonymy when systematic grammatical differences are involved, as they plainly are in the present case. This makes it puzzling how it could possibly be that a construction with a proper name in a referential use, on the one hand, and a definite description with its manifestly different grammar, could possibly ever mean the same. And empirically, they don't. A definite description has referential uses, but it also has quantificational ones, without any change in its internal structure as a phrase. A proper name, by contrast, does not have quantificational uses, unless it co-occurs with a determiner or is pluralized, and hence, forms part of a number phrase, as seen above, and it involves descriptive information in a different and more minimal way than a definite description. Therefore, that names are not ('denuded') definite descriptions is simply a general instance of what is possibly a general law of language: that two grammatically different expressions never mean the same.

### Problem 9

Two grammatically different expressions are likely to never mean the same.

### 3. Conclusions

Once upon a time, philosophers of language restricted themselves to the regimentation of natural language – its formalization in a logical idiom. It is a significant change that by now, their claims have become empirical. This makes them testable. If predicativism is to have empirical support, it needs to overcome the evidence above, in addition to the evidence from a number of other domains of inquiry mentioned above, including language development, neurodevelopmental disorders, single case studies, and the processing of language in the brain. Empirically, proper names can function as predicates, but they need not. Moreover, predicativism misses an important foundational insight: that predicativity is a grammatical notion. It is the grammar of a language that regulates whether expressions in it are referential or not on an occasion of their use.

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### Short Biography

I am a professor of linguistics (ICREA) at Barcelona and a professor of philosophy at Durham. I have authored three OUP books, including the *Essay on names and truth* (2007). See further <https://sites.google.com/site/wolframhinzen/> and [www.grammar.cat](http://www.grammar.cat).

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Predicativism has been recently defended or at least considered as a contender by a number of researchers in philosophy and formal semantics (see Elbourne 2005; Izumi 2012; Larson and Segal 1995; Geurts 1997; Sawyer 2010; Rami 2014), but Fara (2015) is by far the most explicit version. For an early syntactic proposal, see Sloat (1969). Matushansky (2008) defends not predicativism as defined above but the more cautious position that 'proper names can (though perhaps do not have to) enter syntax as predicates' (p. 575), and that in one particular construction, the so-called naming construction, they must do so. She presupposes, essentially concurring with philosophical and semantic theories, and hence, without independent syntactic evidence, that bare proper names outside of this construction have the form of definite descriptions too. But she 'does not deal with the syntax of [the] well-known ability [of proper names] to appear without an article'. The present article will focus on the philosophical issue. However, for further comments on Matushansky (2006, 2008, 2015), see footnotes 16 and 18.

<sup>2</sup> Here it differs from Burge's (1973) now refuted version of predicativism, which took the unpronounced determiner to be the demonstrative 'that'. What makes Burge's view a non-contender is the fact that the sentence 'That Russell entered' has two readings, none of which (1) has (i) the contrastive reading (*that Russell entered, not this one*) and (ii) the 'affective' one (cf. *That Thatcher was a pain for Britain*) (see Higginbotham 1988).

<sup>3</sup> 'Øthe' is a sign from Fara (2015), which is technically problematic: While (2a) is a representation familiar from syntactic theory, (2b) is not. What can be phonologically empty (unpronounced) is a grammatical *position* (such as D), not a particular lexical item. While 'empty categories' such as PRO (at least on the view that they are lexical items) are inserted into the derivation without a phonological matrix, these categories are different from Fara's 'the' in that they cannot or must not be pronounced. For the existence of a syntactic node with no lexical phonological content, syntactic arguments need to be given, which Fara (2015) does not provide. One can argue that on general grounds, syntactic arguments (as opposed to predicates) must be DPs, which would explain the existence of the D projection, and hence, resolve this particular problem, but crucially not on grounds of names being predicates and without a basis for the conclusion that D would be unpronounced 'the'.

<sup>4</sup> (2) is formally slightly more explicit than Fara (2015) wants to be, who does not make her formal assumptions explicit. To be testable, however, the view needs to be explicit, and (2a) makes no further assumptions that could be linguistically controversial.

<sup>5</sup> The coverage of this view includes Romance and Germanic (Longobardi 1994; 2001; 2005; 2008; Sheehan and Hinzen 2011; Martin and Hinzen 2014); Sinitic (Cheng and Sybesma 1999; Wu and Bodomo 2009), Semitic (Shlonsky 2004); Scandinavian (Julien 2005; Roehrs 2006); Balkan (Dimitrova-Vulchanova and Giusti 1998); and Bantu (Ndayiragije and Nikiema 2011; Crisma, Marten and Sybesma 2011), among others. For a broad synthetic view see Borer (2005) and philosophical embedding Hinzen (2007) and Hinzen and Sheehan (2013). No paper or book in this entire tradition is cited anywhere in the recent predicativism debate in philosophy, with the exception of an inconclusive and now dated discussion in Segal (2001). On alleged evidence for predicativism from languages like Catalan, see the appendix.

<sup>6</sup> As Jeshion (2014) notes, (3a) can be grammatical in a different context. This, however, is crucially one in which the reading of 'Russell' changes and becomes predicative. See further footnote 10.

<sup>7</sup> But crucially not an empty version of 'some' (for the technical reason specified in footnote 3).

<sup>8</sup> Another empirical prediction of predicativism that turns out to be wrong is that proper names should not be able to be grammatical as sentence-initial subjects without a change in their meaning, which they clearly are able to be. In the same way, common nouns with empty determiner positions, as in (5), cannot be such subjects. If they are, this leads to a change in their meaning, which suggests that there is no empty determiner position in this instance. Thus, in (i) below, 'lamb' does not preserve the quantificational interpretation that it has in (4a), but instead denotes a kind, being used referentially. Its structure is therefore not plausibly (ii):

(i) Lamb is not healthy.

(ii) [<sub>DP</sub> Ø [<sub>NP</sub> lamb]] is healthy.

In the same way, it is unexpected that proper name in sentence-initial subject positions should have empty determiner positions.

<sup>9</sup> In some languages including English, the reading of such a phrase can in special cases also be non-contrastive, as when some given attribute has become part of a complex proper name like 'The great Alexander', which effectively functions like an idiom. The same applies to proper names like 'Napoleon the first', which has the rigid interpretation that we expect from a proper name, unlike the lexically identical phrase 'the first Napoleon' (counting in the Bonaparte dynasty), which is a definite description and has a descriptive reading.

<sup>10</sup> As Jeshion (2014) correctly observes, (9a) can be grammatical in a different context, and in the absence of any modifying adjective or relative clause, as in 'An Alfred and an Aaron attended the party. The Alfred resides in Venice.' (her ex. 94), which again has a contrastive reading. In this case, the descriptive information comes from the antecedent of the anaphoric (unstressed) 'the', in which the proper name functions as a predicate describing an individual as 'an Alfred'.



<sup>11</sup> Note that the problem here is not that 'Russell' is referential as used in (1). The problem rather is that positing its underlying structure as being that of a definite description predicts wrongly that its reading in this instance should be like the ones we see when the name actually is part of a definite description. I thank Robin Jeshion for inciting this note.

<sup>12</sup> Not the name is the complement of the determiner, but the phrase that it projects. Grammar combines phrases, not words.

<sup>13</sup> This is so unless the view maintains that grammar is completely irrelevant to the correctness of the theory, and can be stipulated in line with one's preferred theory of proper names. I take it here that predicativism is intended to be an empirical scientific theory about the actual grammar of proper names.

<sup>14</sup> Fara's solution to this (non-) problem is that proper names and common nouns are nouns of different noun classes, analogous to mass and count nouns. This fails to recognize that the differences between them (to do with referentiality and predicativity) are phrasal-level (indeed sentential-level) phenomena; hence, not explicable on the basis of noun classes.

<sup>15</sup> Why, nonetheless, do we hear referential uses of proper names as somewhat more standard than quantificational uses, and the reverse in the case of common nouns? Because the proper name/common noun distinction is a lexical reflex of a difference in the grammatical behavior of the two, referentiality and predicativity are grammatical phenomena, which occur at the level of phrases in sentences. Yet human languages are organized such that some grammatical behaviors are fairly predictable lexically (though as this discussion illustrates, never totally: only grammar has the ultimate say on how a lexical item behaves, as Borer 2005, discusses at length).

<sup>16</sup> As Matushansky (2006:303–4) correctly notes, who does not deal with this case in any detail. She also stipulates a morphological process to explain the ability of proper names to occur without determiners in some languages including English, presupposing the definite article to be present morphosyntactically in such cases. This process of 'm-merger' faces the difficulty of explaining the determiner's obligatory absence ('I met (\*the) Russell') in referential readings and obligatory presence in predicative ones (e.g., 'there are many/some/the Russells, but only one Wittgenstein'), which is not a morphological distinction, and of why only the definite article is subject to this process.

<sup>17</sup> Fara (2015:71) mentions in a footnote that 'In a number of natural languages, definite articles before unmodified singular names can, at least sometimes, get pronounced. Examples are Portuguese, Modern Greek, French, German, Italian, and Spanish'. The problem is that 'standard sort of evidence' (ibid.) for when and whether definite articles can/must be dropped or can/must be pronounced are highly systematic and covary with the meanings derived, and have been taken to support the opposite view of Fara's (cf. Longobardi 1994; 2005: 2008, among others).

<sup>18</sup> Matushansky (2008:575) herself writes cautiously that 'If the second extended NP in naming constructions is a predicate, proper names can (though perhaps do not have to) enter syntax as predicates'. The problem is that grammar of one construction is not the grammar of another construction. Her independent philosophical and formal-semantic claim that the semantics is the same in the two constructions (i.e., a descriptive/predicative one), which could motivate a hypothesis that the grammar, though plainly different, is 'underlyingly' the same, is disputed here. On the present proposal, names 'enter syntax' with a lexical content only (consisting of an association between a word and a thing, without grammar). It is the grammar that regulates their referentiality on an occasion of their use. Matushansky (2015) makes a similar construction-specific case for modified proper names. Here, she again argues against the 'simple constant' view that an argument proper name, while definite, 'is a syntactic and semantic atom with no internal structure', uniformly 'denoting entities' (pp.335–6). However, this 'atomistic' view can be false without predicativism in the sense above being true, as the tradition mentioned in footnote 5 shows that names do not uniformly 'denote entities' does not mean they uniformly denote predicates. Moreover, it can hardly be said that construction-specific evidence from modified proper names 'provide conclusive evidence in favor of the predicational approach to proper names'. The evidence they provide consists in the fact that in this construction, a predicate is present functioning as a restrictive modifier, which as such can only combine (i.e., modify) another predicate, in this case the name. This doesn't mean that when no such modifier and article are present and the grammar is different, the proper name functions predicatively as well. The naming predicate 'is called Maria', moreover, which is said to be present in any use of 'Maria' on semantic grounds, is plainly not visible syntactically when it is not actually there.

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## APPENDIX

- (1) **The data from Balearic Catalan (courtesy Joana Rossello):** In (i.a) below, we see the standard (masculine singular, MSG) definite determiner that goes with common nouns on predicative occurrences of these, while in (i.b), we see the definite determiner specialized for proper names in referential uses. As (i.d) shows, this determiner becomes ungrammatical and has to be switched for the other, when a descriptive is generated by coercing the proper name into a predicative position, similar to that of the common noun in (i.c). Crucially, the determiner for proper names in their referential uses doesn't even have a plural form: in this sense, what the grammar here expresses is that the idea of a 'plural proper name',

in a referential use, makes no sense. (ii) shows the same facts for the feminine determiner. (iii) shows for both Genders that, where the proper name determiner is used, only a non-restrictive (i.e., referential) reading is available, with the relative clause merely appositive and requiring comma intonation. (iv) shows that when a restrictive reading of a proper name is forced, no good solution is available.

- (i) a. Es ca/\*En ca  
TheMSG dog
- b. En Joan/\*Es Joan  
TheMSG Joan
- c. E(l)s (cinc) cans  
TheMPL (five) dogs
- d. E(l)s (cinc) Joans  
TheMPL (five) Joans
  
- (ii) a. Sa cadira/\*Na cadira  
TheFSG chair
- b. Na Maria/\*Sa Maria  
TheFSG Maria
- c. Ses (tres) cadires  
TheFPL cadires
- d. Ses (tres) Maries  
TheFPL (three) Marias
  
- (iii) a. En Pere, es qui sempre arriba tard, avui no vendrà  
TheMSG Pere, theMSG who always arrives late, today will not come  
Pere, the one who is always late, will not come today
- b. Na Maria, sa qui sempre arriba tard, avui no vendrà  
TheFSG Maria, theFSG who always arrives late, today will not come  
Maria, the one who is always late, will not come today
  
- (iv) a. ?En Pere/?Na Maria que va suspendre no hi és
- b. \*Es Pere/\*Sa Maria que va suspendre no hi és  
TheMSG Pere/TheFSG Maria that failed is not here/that s/he failed is not here

- (2) **The data from standard mainland Catalan (courtesy Txuss Martin):**(v) illustrates that in mainland (mainly written) Catalan, the standard common noun determiner has to be used when the proper name is pluralized and has a descriptive reading. Example (vi) is from Longobardi (1994), example 50, and is the case analogous to (iv): 'el' (as opposed to 'es' in Balearic Catalan) is here the standard common noun determiner. So (vi) shows, for this language, that a restrictive reading is out with the proper name determiner and the common noun determiner has to be chosen. The pattern is the opposite for a non-restrictive, appositive clause, with comma intonation, as shown in (vii). (viii) again shows a restrictive reading, and the proper name determiner is out, as in (vi). Finally, (ix) shows that where an adjective is present but the reading is non-restrictive (i.e., not that of a definite description), as in (8) above, a partitive construction has to be used, with the proper name determiner in embedded position:

- (i) a. \*Ens (dos) Peres  
The (two) Peters
- b. Els (dos) Peres  
The (two) Peters
- (ii) El/\*En Joan que coneixia ja no existeix.  
The John I knew no longer exists.
- (iii) En/\*El Joan, a qui coneixes, va marxar  
John, who you know, left.
- (iv) El/\*En Joan alt va venir a la festa, però no el petit.  
The tall John came to the party, not the short one.
- (v) El bonàs d' en Joan vingué tard  
The good-old of the Joan came late  
'Good old John came late'

(3) **Further relevant data from Spanish and Catalan (courtesy Txuss Martin):** Standard Spanish lacks a proper name determiner, yet the definite determiner has to be absent when the proper name occurs with a relative clause with a non-restrictive reading (x), while it is obligatorily present with a restrictive reading:

- (i) (\*El) Juan, a quien conoces, se fue  
John, who you know, left
- (ii) \*(El) Juan que conoces se fue.  
The John you know left

These data are parallel to English. In this context, Catalan adds an interesting twist. It is that 'a qui' (with a-marking and the i-morpheme, which Martin (2012) identifies as a deictic one) is ungrammatical in restrictive relatives, which means that the default form of the relative pronoun 'que' is used, as (iii) shows

- (iii) (En Joan {a qui/\*que} coneixes va marxar.  
The John who you know left

The opposite is the case in appositive (non-restrictive) relatives, where the default form 'que' must not be used:

- (iv) (En Joan, {a qui/\*que} coneixes, va marxar.  
In English, by contrast, the equivalent 'who' is used in both restrictive and appositive relatives:
- (v) John, {who/\*that} you know, left yesterday
- (vi) The John {who/\*that} you know left yesterday

In being richer in this fashion, the data from Spanish and Catalan indicate in this way, too, how the grammar is overtly sensitive to referential vs. predicative interpretations. The

additional structure – i-marking as well as a-marking – is required for referential interpretations, while it is not needed for weaker predicative ones, in line with Martin and Hinzen (2014), who provide evidence that referential interpretations systematically require more grammatical complexity than predicative ones (I owe this point to Txuss Martin). Overall, the data from all three languages show clearly that the grammar is systematically sensitive to whether a proper name has a referential or predicative interpretation, hence to whether it functions as a predicate or not.